

## **In Unerring Pursuit of the Recurrent Theme**

### Statement on the Progress Report 2004 relating to the German Government's Sustainable Strategy

#### **Positive basic image, but still not safety tested for the future**

The Progress Report sums up and assesses the measures which have been taken by the German government with respect to the sustainability policy since 2002. At that time – in the run-up to the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg – the government presented the first national sustainability strategy; now the first factual status report has been submitted. The report underlines the need for reporting and highlights the continuity and procedural character of the sustainability policy. It is meaningful to make the sustainability policy measurable and transparent by applying quantified indicators. At the same time, reporting on pilot projects and focal issues is both meaningful and necessary.

Germany's politics and economy have not yet been safety-tested for the future. Whilst the Progress Report provides a positive basic image of the measures that have been taken and planned, overall it is apparent that politics and society still have a long way to go before the needs of future generations are taken into account on decisions being made today on environmental, the economic and social matters.

For the first time ever, a government report has also explicitly acknowledged statements and impressions from civil society in the shape of the snapshot on sustainability and society prepared by the German Council for Sustainable Development as part of the social dialogue. A brief summary of the recommendations of the Council's "Goal 30 HA" on the future of land use in rural and urban development has been incorporated into the report and the recommendations themselves form part of an assessment of further possible actions which the German government may take. Recommendations from the Council have also been included on other issues (guidelines for a modern coal policy; energy pilot projects; sustainability and

consumption). In part, the Council's comments on previously drafted versions of the Progress Report have also been taken into account.

Through this process, the Progress Report marks the beginning of a new reporting practice. Contributions which have arisen through participation and dialogue are able to strengthen more readily the personal accountability of the players than when the reporting of governmental activities is limited to a purely government-based reporting on state activities. These beginnings are both tentative and experimental. In future, they should be specifically built upon and shaped. They can help to more effectively put the sustainability policy more to the fore than has been the case to date.

The activities that were reported on pertaining to the fuel strategy and to the self-perception of the ageing society ("The potentials of elderly people in the economy and society") - especially given the unanswered issues that have been made evident - read like a report on a workshop of the future. Here, the nature of the sustainability strategy as a search for future solutions with the involvement of all players becomes evident. This underscores that sustainability policy is geared to values, lifestyles as well as social and technological innovations and that each individual's reality of life can be attained. This can only be established to a limited extent in the other chapters.

### **Sustainability – a recurrent theme?**

The German government believes that, in the vast majority of the 21 indicators, it is on the right track (Pages 35 and 36 of the Progress Report). However, it also rightly admits that key indicators such as energy productivity, mobility and land use are subject to cyclical developments (less coal output, less traffic, less construction), which does not de facto but merely apparently indicates that there is sustainability.

The "recurrent theme of sustainability" (sustainability strategy 2002) is not yet discernible in the government's actions. In this respect, the sustainability strategy is too isolated next to the dominating political fields of economic and social policy. Great efforts are being put into hyping Agenda 2010, unlike the sustainability strategy. In the latest advertising campaign for Agenda 2010 (which was run around the turn of the year 2004 / 2005), the sustainability

strategy is mentioned as being one of numerous facets in the reform policy, but, with everything being reduced to a few factual questions it ranks merely as a side aspect.

### **Individual aspects relating to the Council's recommendations**

The incorporation of the Council's contributions to land use underscores the critical dialogue between the Council and the German government. In the Progress Report, the material recommendations put forward by the Council on how to reduce land use, for example by abolishing home grants, mileage rate and other subsidies and by incorporating an instrument with binding objectives into the planning legislation, are only referred to in a non-committal manner but without mention of any concrete implementation steps. The German Council for Sustainable Development expects the German government to continue its commitment towards implementing these measures.

One welcome sign is that, in the research programmes, the German government is seeking to further consolidate the knowledge base and practical experience on budgetary land management. With respect to "Goal 30 HA.", the Council will continue to follow the activities undertaken by the German government with a critical eye.

The status of work performed in the pilot projects which the Council brought into the sustainability strategy is particularly noteworthy. The Council for its part proposed these projects because they (a) can show the paths towards sustainable development in a concrete and "tangible" fashion, and (b) because they necessitate the integration of a variety of political fields and therefore point to a requisite, new sustainability management. On balance, the results are mixed in this area.

The pilot projects coordinated by the German Energy Agency on "Taking Stock of Low-Energy Housing" and "Energy-Efficient Contracting in Federal Realty" have progressed at a slower pace than intended but are obviously moving in the right direction. The project entitled "Energy Consumption in Buildings" is described in detail by the German government which makes reference to partial successes and objectives.

The pilot project under the auspices of the Federal Ministry for Economic Development which goes by the name "Sustainet" would certainly have deserved a mention in the section entitled "Assuming global responsibility" because the pilot project seeks to find effective

approaches to an environmentally friendly use of land and food security, but it still faces personnel and financial restrictions.

With regard to the “Sustainable Goods Project”, the Council’s impulse was taken up by Germany’s consumer ministry and used to launch a new campaign. However, it is too early to judge how relevant the action and how effective the campaign has been, for one thing because the Progress Report holds back on its description of concrete political measures.

The Council’s recommendations on energy policy (“Clean Coal”, and CO<sub>2</sub>-free coal fired power stations, energy efficiency, grids, renewable energies, energy research and advancement of innovation) are explicitly and implicitly taken up by the Progress Report at several junctures.

The Progress Report refers to research programmes and development projects on such issues as driving materials and propulsion technology, the architecture of the energy supply grid, on demographics and developments in transport and on the perception of ageing. However, it fails to identify more clearly the challenges facing sustainable development for the entire scientific world.

The report has taken up the proposal which emerged from consultations that, wherever factually applicable, a reference to people’s lifestyles and ways of life should be included, for example in remarks on energy utilisation and, above all, consumption policy. However, the reference to values in sustainability policy and their reflection on people’s everyday life is unduly abbreviated by the fact that the focus is placed on consumption issues. The significance of individual lifestyles for decisions made in society on sustainability must not be reduced to the aspect of consumption which, while certainly being important, is not the sole aspect.

On the preceding drafts, the German Council for Sustainable Development had suggested that a ‘catchy’ title or perhaps a motto should precede the words “Progress Report” because the heading “Progress Report 2004” is barely suitable for public communication. It is regrettable that the German government could not see its way to pursuing this proposal. At the same time, the promised wide-scale dissemination of the report in both full and abridged form is an important and satisfying move as this will enable the report to actually reach and catch on at local level of the Agenda policy for the first time.

The Progress Report explicitly addresses the European dimension of sustainability policy. It is absolutely essential for the future that a link is established between the national sustainability strategy/strategies and the European level of activity; the relevant declaration of intent of the German government (p. 142) is a welcome step. Other pointers put forward by the Council on the draft, such as taking the “domestic flights” dimension out of the indicator equation on the modal split (p. 54); the reference to the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (pp. 21; 126) or a stronger reference to the forest issue in the context of consumption policy (p. 115 et. seq.) have all been taken into account.

### **Honing the Profile**

Regrettably, the Progress Report missed an opportunity to lend more profile to the sustainability policy using the more or less well-known objective conflicts and with respect to the quasi “internal” discussion taking place on priorities. This would certainly have been possible given the issues included in the report – and should indeed have been necessary from a factual point of view, for example in view of the financial squeeze in the transportation infrastructure (railway). Another item which undoubtedly deserved inclusion and which the report had promised to deliver in 2004 but which it does not contain relates to the examination of how the levying of taxes on vehicles should be enhanced to take into account ecological factors in order to demonstrate that the qualitative standards of sustainability are suited to highlighting and ultimately eliminating objective conflicts.

Furthermore, the Progress Report documents implicitly that a higher-profile presence and political visibility of the sustainability policy can be evidenced for example through sustainable efficiency and resource productivity as well as the creation of new services for combining medical, nursing and social care, and the creation of new types of housing in response to the changes in demographic structure and lifestyles.

### **Announcements**

Contrary to its originally announced intention, the Progress Report opts not to present the key issues for the reporting period 2004 – 2006. At various stages in the report, it does, however, give notice of highly significant content and focal issues for the report due in 2006. These include, for example, the intention to put the entire sustainability strategy to the test, to draw

conclusions for the energy-political instruments of the future from further energy structure measures, to prepare new forecasts for developing mobility and demography, to concretise the fuel strategy, to broach the issue of eco-tax, to submit a “national noise protection package” (p. 106), and to further develop the political framework for sustainable consumption and sustainable production models.

The German Council for Sustainable Development believes the intended work to be essential content for the sustainable strategy and that such content is in tune with the other steps which are required overall if Germany is to gradually develop into a society geared towards sustainability. This is not to say that these assessments have made the determination of key issues expendable: for the profile of the German government’s sustainability policy there can be no other way than to narrow down the focus to a few key political issues.

---

The German Council for Sustainable Development was established in April 2001 by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. It develops contributions for the government’s sustainable strategy and sustainable policy, identifies concrete fields of activity and projects, and maintains the importance of “sustainability” as a public issue. The Council comprises 19 members, all of whom are public figures: Dr. Volker Hauff (Chairman), Horst Frank, Rainer Grohe, Hermann Graf Hatzfeldt, Roland Heinisch, Prof. Dr. Stefan Homburg, Prof. Dr. Eberhard Jochem, Prof. Dr. Edda Müller, Heinz Putzhammer, Prof. Dr. Jürgen Rimpau, Prof. Dr. Josef Sayer, Tobi Schlegl, Marlehn Thieme, Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Holger Tschense, Prof. Dr. Fritz Vahrenholt, Eggert Voscherau, Hubert Weinzierl, Dr. Angelika Zahrt.

Head office of the Germany Council for Sustainable Development:  
Dr. Günther Bachmann  
Reichpietschufer 50, D-10785 Berlin  
[T] +49(0)30 2 54 91 - 780  
[F] +49(0)30 2 54 91 - 785  
[E] [guenther.bachmann@nachhaltigkeitsrat.de](mailto:guenther.bachmann@nachhaltigkeitsrat.de)  
[W] [www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de](http://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de)